

League of Women Voters of Mountain Lakes

Woodlands, Parks and Streams Consensus

April 2002

The League of Women Voters of Mountain Lakes acknowledges that one of the reasons many residents choose to live in Mountain Lakes is the Borough's wooded setting. From the very beginning of the Borough as a planned community, the open space and parkland has played an important role in the character and beauty of Mountain Lakes. The League encourages the preservation of our current percentage of open space.

The League supports:

- Protecting the Borough's woodlands and open space from development
- Protecting streams
- Utilizing the Borough's less sensitive open space for residents enjoyment with care for the natural environment
- Taking judicious action to maintain the health of the woodlands
- Educating residents about our woodlands and streams

The League recommends that an effective stewardship program be instituted. To oversee these efforts, the League proposes that the Borough assign management of the woodlands to a subcommittee of the Environmental Commission, and more proactive management of the streams to the appropriate existing Borough committee or commission.

Protection of Woodlands— The League recommends that the Borough of Mountain Lakes formulate and adopt an Open Space Plan as part of its Master Plan. This plan would delineate a clear, long-term strategy for the protection and utilization of the Borough's open space. The Open Space Plan would aid in prioritizing parcels of Borough-owned land in order of environmental significance, identifying land that is environmentally sensitive or most precious to the Borough's character. The League recommends that this plan be written with expert guidance.

The League strongly supports the Mountain Lakes Land Conservancy in its aim to irrevocably protect parcels of privately owned land from development. The League recommends that the Borough consider expanding the mission of the Mountain Lakes

Land Conservancy to include holding conservation easements on sensitive public lands.

Protection of Streams – Recognizing the importance of streams to the health of the ecosystem, the League supports protection of streams in Mountain Lakes beyond existing ordinances. The League is specifically concerned about the lack of vegetative buffers along many streams in the Borough. Awareness programs about our streams, including naming them, and education projects in the schools are efforts that the League supports. In addition, the League suggests that the appropriate Borough committee implement an ordinance for stream management. The League recommends that the committee explore a Riparian buffer ordinance.

Utilization of Open Space / Woodlands - The League supports having environmentally friendly trails (i.e., no pavement, eco-wise placement) in Borough-owned properties, including linking pocket parks, for residents' use. The trails should be as "natural" as possible, meaning no man-made benches, picnic tables or trashcans that require further maintenance. The judicious use of trails would allow residents to become more familiar with the woods and thus help in the education, care and stewardship of the woodlands and streams. Some Borough-owned wooded areas may best be left in a totally natural state. The League recommends consultation with a trails expert in planning new trails. The League also encourages the Borough to notify adjacent property owners in advance of any changes to be made to Borough property.

Maintenance of the Woodlands – The League recognizes that there are three main factors beyond age and the current drought that are negatively affecting the condition of woodlands in Mountain Lakes: deer, exotic invasive plants and dumping/encroachment.

The League strongly supports professional culling of the herd as the desired form of deer management. Recognizing that cost is a consideration, we understand that residents are currently spending far in excess of the expense of culling on replanting gardens, repairing accident damage and treating for Lyme disease. To be effective, deer management should be an ongoing program and include discussions with neighboring communities. The League recommends that the Borough move ahead as soon as possible to determine the size of the herd and to contract with culling management professionals. The League encourages educating residents on all aspects of deer management in order to gain acceptance for a management program.

As to exotic invasive plants that are growing wild in the woodlands, the League supports a proactive management approach, perhaps carried out by volunteers. The League recommends that residents be educated about the negative effects on the

woodlands of popular non-native, invasive plants growing on private properties, and that they pass this information on to their landscapers.

The League is concerned with the health and maintenance of the many "pocket parks" in our Borough. Recognizing that these parks are important buffers between manicured private properties, the League is concerned with the inability of these lots to maintain themselves naturally. The parks are showing their years of neglect with the dumping of leaves, brush and garbage. One suggestion is an "adopt-a-lot" program for stewardship of these smaller wooded lots by civic and neighborhood groups. We recommend that such a program include: (a.) clear guidelines to prevent over-manicuring and encroachment, (b.) protection of habitats, (c.) training of volunteers and (d.) regular monitoring by the woodlands subcommittee of the Environmental Commission. In conclusion, the League encourages continuing education of the public about their woodlands and greater enforcement of current ordinances.